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ONTARIO GOVERNMENT REDUCING HEALTH CARE WAIT TIMES

New Wait Time Data Shows Double-Digit Drops in the North West Area

TORONTO – New data shows the Ontario government's Wait Time Strategy is resulting in decreases in wait times for key health services in the North West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) area, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"Trends in the North West LHIN area are encouraging with significant decreases in wait times for a number of key health services," Smitherman said. "Through the leadership and hard work of thousands of front line health professionals, the Wait Time Strategy is clearly achieving real results for patients by improving access to care, closer to home."

As a result of the government's Wait Time Strategy, wait times in which nine out of 10 patients have completed their surgery or have had their exam in the North West LHIN area have decreased significantly since August/September 2005 by:

- 74.4 per cent for MRI scans (160 days)
- 62.7 per cent for angiography (32 days)
- 48.4 per cent for knee replacement (243 days)
- 31.6 per cent for cancer surgery (18 days)
- 10.3 per cent for hip replacement (19 days).

At the same time, Smitherman acknowledged two health service areas that remain a challenge – there has been a 67.3 per cent increase in wait times in CT scans, and a 58.8 per cent increase in cataract surgery since August/September 2005.

"We continue to make significant investments in CT scans and cataract surgery, and we expect to see improvements in wait times for these areas," Smitherman said. "Recently, the government invested \$702,000 in Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre to expand its cataract surgery program."

Since the launch of the Wait Time Strategy, the Ontario government has invested \$21,656,932 for additional procedures in hospitals in the North West LHIN area, including:

- 4,751 cataract surgeries (\$3,613,250)
- 1,996 cardiac procedures (\$346,400)
- 1,347 hip and knee joint replacements (\$9,502,230)
- 374 cancer surgeries (\$2,007,852)
- 16,548 hours, 24,822 exams MRI (\$5,434,900)
- 3,009 hours, 10,532 exams CT (\$752,300).

The new wait time data is available at www.ontariowaittimes.com, which is closing in on nearly 4 million hits as of today.

"We continue to have the shortest wait times for cancer surgery in the province and have made excellent progress in reducing wait times in other key areas such as hip and knee replacements," says Gwen DuBois-Wing, CEO of the North West LHIN. "We are seeing a real difference for residents in northwestern Ontario thanks to the collaborative efforts of the front line staff in our health services organizations."

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait time and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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